

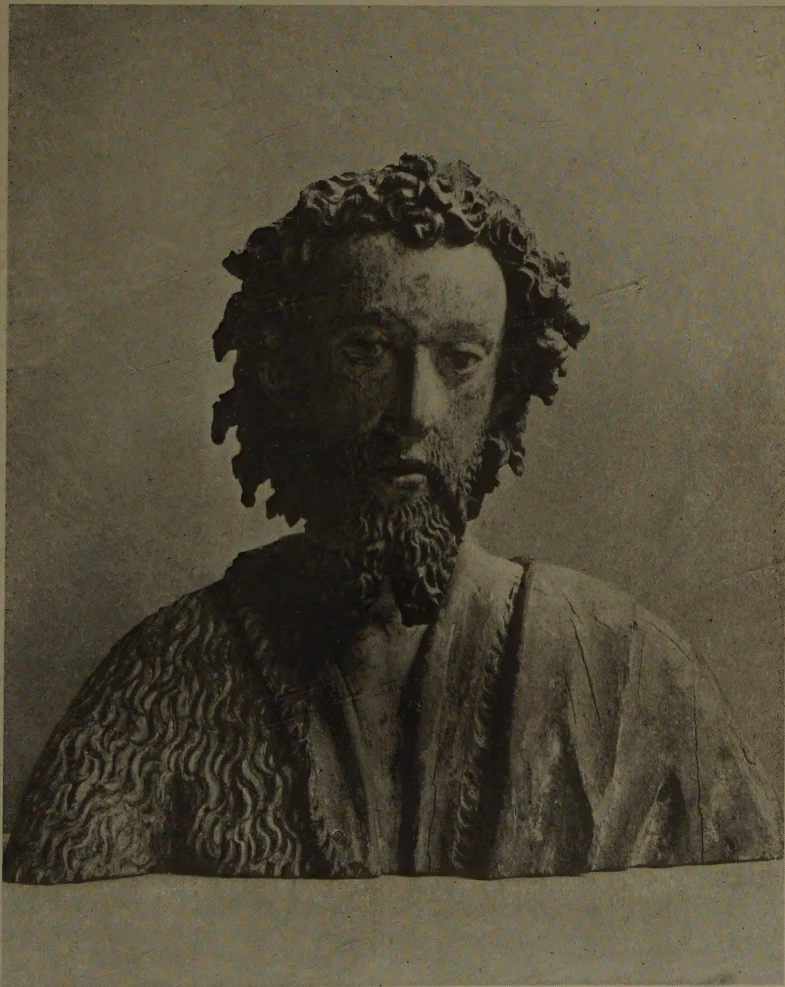
Bulletin of the Rhode Island School of Design

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No. 4



JOHN THE BAPTIST

German, Westphalian School

15th Century

Gift of Mrs. JESSE H. METCALF

In the death of Miss Lyra Brown Nickerson the Rhode Island School of Design has lost a member and friend who had shown for years in numberless ways her deep interest in its work.

Her father, Mr. Edward I. Nickerson, was for twenty-four years a Trustee of the School of Design and served for many years with much ability and fidelity upon the Executive Committee. Visitors to the Museum have often had the privilege of enjoying the fine works of art collected by him in Italy and in Egypt.

It will be the duty of the Rhode Island School of Design to use the noble bequest left by Miss Nickerson in ways that will keep in beautiful and enduring memory the name of one who showed herself in her short life to be one of the most generous and public-spirited citizens of our State.

THREE EXAMPLES OF GERMAN SCULPTURE.

THE present interest in wood-sculpture is a matter of growth in very recent years, so far as the American museums of art are concerned. The high artistic feeling and the sincere expression of national spirit have long warranted the keen interest of European museums in acquisitions of this character. The result is that many of the finer examples have long since found a permanent home in well-known collections abroad. However, there are still opportunities to secure characteristic examples of this art.

While wooden sculpture was made in all the European countries, the art of the German territory along the Rhine has a distinct appeal. As was true elsewhere, the earlier work was more architectural in nature, while the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries found the sculpture becoming decidedly individual, with increased emphasis on realism.

The German sculptor of the period was essentially national in his work, often emphasizing the emotional and imaginative characteristics which have been so frequently noted in the art of that part of Europe. This was perhaps nearer true of the larger groups, such as the elaborate altarpieces, than of the single figures.

The three pieces of German sculpture in wood, which were given to the Museum

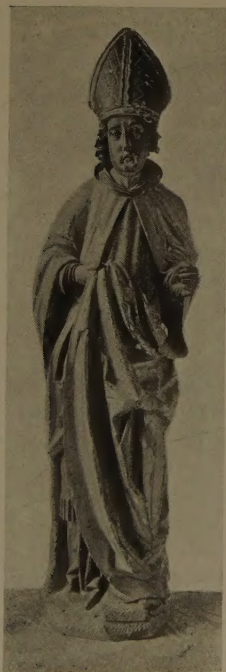
during the past year by Mrs. Jesse H. Metcalf, are representative and interesting examples. Of these, the most important one is the bust of Saint John the Baptist, of linden wood. It is of the Westphalian School, and dates from the end of the fifteenth century. The saint is shown as a young ascetic, clothed in his garment of camel's hair. He is a favorite saint in Christian Art, taking precedence even over the Evangelists and Apostles in frequency of representation. About his garment, Clement of Alexandria, writing at the close of the second century A. D., says, "The blessed John, despising the locks of sheep as savoring of luxury, chose camel's hair and was clad in it, making himself an example of frugality and simplicity of life." (Pædagogus, Bk. II.)

The modelling of the bust is of superior merit, with full appreciation of the possibilities of the subject. The traces of color give added interest. The flesh color is well preserved, the red lips and cheeks being delicately treated. Other color is found in the brown hair, the red in the inner shirt, and the white priming with traces of gilding on the camel's hair. Westphalia, although bordering on Flanders and feeling the influence of its art, held to the Teutonic spirit of the period in its attitude towards realism and use of colors.

The figure of the Bishop dates from about 1500-1550, and doubtless is Tyrolese or Bavarian in origin. It was intended to

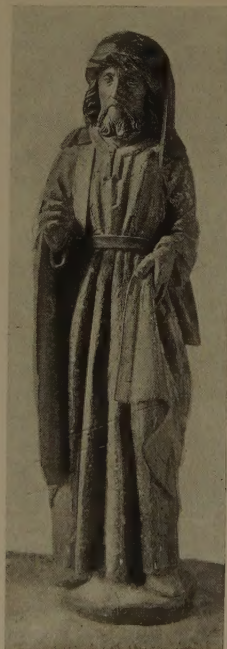
be placed on an altar or wall high enough to allow it to be looked at from below. That would account for certain conventional exaggerations in the modelling. In this figure also, color is much in evidence.

oak, and occasionally pine and poplar. All possess in varying degree the desirable element of closeness of fibre, and several are slow to show rot or decay. The Flemish artist, whose work always



STATUE OF BISHOP

Tyrolese



JOSEPH OF ARIMATHAEA

Franconian

Gift of Mrs. JESSE H. METCALF

The golden mantle and mitre, the maroon gloves and the collar around the neck, the red shoes, and the blue lining to the cloak show how much the artist depended on his use of color. The material is linden wood. The modelling is very bold in its character.

A like interest is found in the third figure, which is probably Joseph of Arimathea. This is also of linden wood, dating about 1500, and of Franconian workmanship. Here, too, color is much in evidence, in the golden mantle, the blue lining, and the figured robe below, which is held by a girdle.

The woods especially available for the German sculptor were linden, pear, walnut,

bears interesting comparison with that of his Teutonic neighbor, used walnut and oak as his favorite woods. While it is not possible to generalize too much it may be shown that linden wood was high in favor in Germany for the same reason which encouraged its use in Italy. Vasari in his "Introduction on Technique" says that "it is the best because it is equally porous on every side, and it more readily obeys the rasp and chisel. But when the artificer wishes to make a larger figure, since he cannot make it all of one single piece, he must join other pieces to it and add to its height and enlarge it according to the form that he wishes to make." L. E. R.

TRANSITION IN ART.

WONDER has occasionally been expressed that those responsible for our art museums should allow representation to the newer phases of art expression, which in recent years have seemed so radically different from those with which most people are familiar. It is most interesting to note the form which this adverse criticism may take. In some instances bewilderment is shown, in others scorn, still more show hasty judgment based on a first glance, without that careful analysis of the picture and the personal knowledge which leads to criticism worthy of the connoisseur.

There is a most interesting parallel between this modern denial of any merit in cubism, futurism, post-impressionism or any other of the unfamiliar movements, and that which has so frequently been expressed in French Salons since the days of the men of 1830. It is still more to the point to note that many of the artists who received the severest criticism, because they were innovators, have since been judged to be influential leaders in European art. In the case of art to-day, it is not necessary that we should yield the point that every artist who produces something bizarre and startling is to be considered a leader. It is but fair to him and his work to reserve expressed judgment until he has been judged by the standards of personality, of expressive imagination, of sincere striving after the secrets of nature's manifestations, and of technique.

Criticism is often directed against the draughtsmanship, and rightly, too, but in such judgment it is necessary to determine whether the drawing has been purposely subjected to some other feature. Then, too, the right of individuality of expression must be realized. Truly did Alfred Stevens say, "Put three landscape painters before a landscape and each will interpret it according to his temperament; nevertheless it is the same landscape. Where, then, is found what is now agreed to call the tone of nature?"

It is not our purpose to discuss individually any of the movements in art that have been mentioned, but rather to call attention to the subtle and constant transitions of art-development. A cursory glance at the history of art may easily develop the idea that no great changes or improvements are possible. A more thorough acquaintance shows us that the history of art is a constant series of varying racial and individual expression, and of constant experimentation, the results of which are sometimes positive and at others negative. In any case only that which is best will survive the tests which will be placed upon it in the future.

It is our pleasant duty then to judge the newer expressions with an appreciation of all that has been mentioned, to discover the problem in the painter's mind, if that is possible, and then to see whether or not for us he has been successful.

Our heritage of European art and particularly of that phase of English subject-painting which dates from Hogarth to the present time, has so influenced our judgment that it is frequently with difficulty that we can appreciate the Chinese, Japanese or Persian artistic expression, which in certain respects comes nearer to the highest standards than our own art.

At present many persons accept Italian Renaissance painting, even by the greatest masters, because the critics hold them to be of most superior merit. This was not always true, for there is that interesting letter of Boucher to Fragonard, both artists of great importance in French art, which is translated by A. E. Eddy in his "Cubists and Post-Impressionists" from the magazine "L'Art Decoratif." It reads as follows: "Dear Fragonard: You are going to see in Italy the works of Raphael, Michael Angelo, and their imitators; I say to you in confidence and as a friend, if you take these people seriously you are lost." It is easy to read this and say that Boucher was wrong. It is quite another thing to comprehend wherein lies the greatness of the Italian masters.

A true judgment on works of art, new

or old, is only possible after a serious effort has been made to understand the man, the idea and the movement expressed by the object.

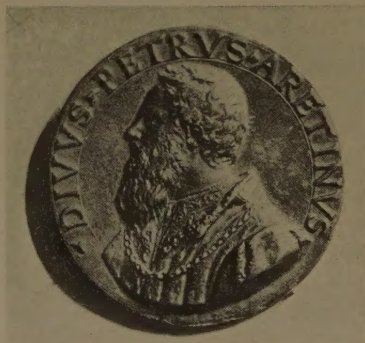
Art museums, therefore, if they live up to their greatest opportunities and functions, do well to show under favorable conditions the new artistic movements as well as the old. In this action they do not necessarily approve in whole or part of the expression. The significant fact is that they give the visitor an opportunity to exercise his own sense of connoisseurship, and that they buy for the permanent collections only those works of superior merit which should be preserved through the years.

RENAISSANCE MEDALS.

IN the fascinating study of numismatics, there are two phases which have the greatest appeal. These are concerned with the coins of Greece and the portrait medals of the Renaissance. It is a matter for congratulation that the Museum should

collection five most excellent medals, three illustrative of the Italian and two of the French Renaissance.

The conception of the portrait-medal belongs to the middle ages, but more

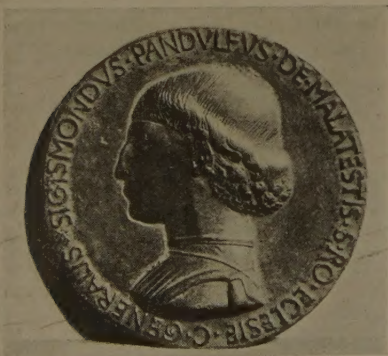


PIETRO ARETINO
BY LEON LEONE
Gift of Mrs. GUSTAV RADEKE

especially to Italy. Here, the emphasis on individuality in the Renaissance, the wealthy families, the number of princes of marked artistic appreciation and the rivalry between cities and courts, combined to develop remarkable examples of this art. Whether or not the idea was suggested by the mediæval seals is not necessary to determine. It is sufficient to find the art starting in Padua, next in Verona, thence spreading to all Italy and then passing on to France and the North.

It is an interesting conjecture as to the possible artistic expression of the Renaissance if it had known Greek sculpture as well as it knew Roman work. The idealism of the Greeks is in sharp contrast with the often-times brutal realism of the Romans. It is perhaps this influence of Latin expression which developed so remarkable a group of portraits during the Renaissance.

The medals were the work of thorough craftsmen, many of them famous in other fields, especially in sculpture in the round. Their technique offers much of interest. The medals as a rule were cast, not struck. The obverse and reverse were modeled in



SIGISMONDO PANDOLFO DI MALATESTA
BY MATTEO DE PASTI
Gift of Mrs. GUSTAV RADEKE

be in a position to show both these expressions of artistic spirit. The visitor finds in the loan collection of Mr. Henry A. Green a well-selected group of Greek coins, while a recent gift from Mrs. Gustav Radeke has secured for our permanent

wax, which is a medium that lends itself to subtle treatment. Next a mould was made out of sand, and the cast made in bronze. Gold, lead and silver were also used, but bronze remained the favorite for years. This was perhaps due to the opportunity for rich warm patina, either brown or greenish, which this material can assume.

Each of the medals in the recent gift merits consideration, for they are well-known examples by famous artists.

The earliest of the medals is by Christoforo di Geremia (circa, 1430-1475). He was born in Mantua, but spent much of his active life in Rome. As the uncle of Lysippus, he exerted great influence on that most important medallist. The medal by this artist is the well-known one with a portrait bust of Alfonso V of Aragon on the obverse and the coronation of the king by Victory and War on the reverse. Both sides have inscriptions and the medal is signed on the reverse CHRISTOPHORUS HIERIMIA.

Perhaps the best known medal of the group is that by Matteo de' Pasti, fifteenth century. On one side is shown the portrait of Sigismondo Pandolfo di Malatesta, Lord of Rimini, and on the other is shown the celebrated castle of the family at Rimini. The medal has an additional interest since this castle was remodeled under the superintendence of the artist.

The third of the medals is the work of Leon Leone (circa, 1509-1590) a native of Arezzo, and a sculptor in marble and bronze as well as a medallist. It was characteristic of the Renaissance that men of literary and scholarly brilliance should stand high in favor at the court, so it is of interest to note that Leone's medal shows on the obverse a portrait of Pietro Aretino, the celebrated poet of Arezzo, and the reverse an allegorical group, showing the victory of Truth.

The two French medals are by Guillaume Dupré of whom Natalis Rondot said, "He never had his equal." This extreme view may not be accepted by all who study medals, but there is no question about

Dupré being the greatest medallist of the French School. As sculptor in ordinary to Henry IV, he produced much of merit. Dupré was born at Sissonne, near Laon, in 1574, visited Italy in 1611-1613, was a favorite artist of the king for years, and died in 1647.

One of the medals shows the portraits of Henry IV of France and Marie de Medici on the obverse, while the reverse shows the figures of the king and Victory greeting each other and grasping hands. The putti figure below is characteristic of the Renaissance. This medal is signed and dated in 1603.

The last shows the obverse only, with a bust of Francesco de Medici facing to the right. This is dated 1613, and in addition has an inscription.

The student of the Renaissance need not be reminded of the influence which the parties who were represented played in that period of intense living, which as Walter Pater has well said "can hardly be studied too much, not merely for its positive results in the things of the intellect and the imagination, its concrete works of art, its special and prominent personalities, with their profound æsthetic charm, but for its general spirit and character."

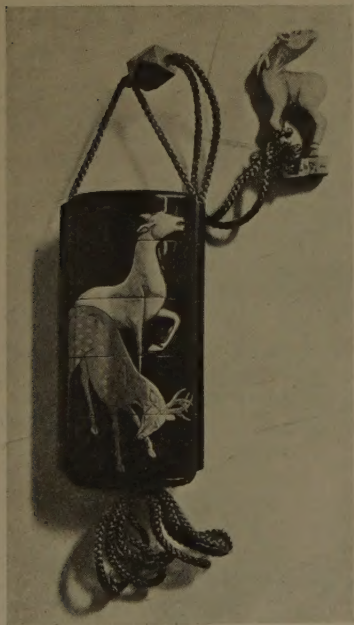
A JAPANESE INRO.

THE gift to the Museum of a Japanese inro, not only adds to the collection an unusual example of lacquer work, but brings us into contact with the school of Korin, one of Japan's greatest artists.

Inro were first made to serve as boxes for seals, but later became medicine cases. The box is usually divided into a number of sections, with a cover, very carefully fitted together, and held by a silk cord. On the end of this cord was an ivory or wooden netsuke or button, by which the inro was hung from the sash. Although made of a number of materials, inro of lacquered wood were preferred for medicines. This is the material of the inro

under discussion. Instead of a netsuke, there is an ivory seal, fashioned in the shape of a deer.

Lacquer is the sap of the *Rhus Vernicifera*, or lacquer tree of Japan. It may



INRO
School of Korin
Gift of Mrs. GUSTAV RADEKE

be used pure or with added substances. The base is first prepared, often of fine-grained pine wood, carefully smoothed and then coated with repeated coats of the varnish, the drying of which is done in a damp closet or press. Rubbing and polishing each coat is a necessary part of the work. To produce an example of lacquer which would rank as of great merit required months or even years in the making. When to the lustrous surface were added the superior designs of great artists, the example of lacquer was indeed a work of art.

The first artist to introduce such work on inro was Matahei in the seventeenth century, and many were the artists who

followed his example. Of these Ogata Korin (1660-1716) assumes highest place as a worker in lacquer. His powers as a painter were also of the highest quality. This artist was especially noted for originality and boldness of expression. In his inro he frequently made use of a few masses, suppressing unnecessary detail, and placing these figures with such consummate skill as to secure the highest decorative value.

The design which has been chosen is a well-known one. The spotted stag is used in Japanese art to symbolize gentleness, while the white stag and maple tree in association stand for longevity. In working out the design the artist placed the stags on one side of the inro and the maple tree on the other.

While one can hardly be sure that the inro in the recent gift was by the master's hand, it certainly shows his influence, and may well have been the work of a pupil of marked ability. In all its essential decorative treatment the design compares favorably with that on inro known to be from the hand of Korin.

NOTES.

NEW LECTURE COURSES.—The Rhode Island School of Design is offering two new lecture courses of interest to students and the general public. One of these deals with the "History of Design in Building," and will be given by Mr. William T. Aldrich on Wednesday mornings at 11.15, throughout the school year. The second course discusses the "History of Textiles and Furniture," and will be given by Mr. L. Earle Rowe on Friday afternoons at 2 o'clock, to continue through the first term.

POWER-HOUSE.—An important addition to the equipment of the institution was installed in the power-house during the past summer. This was the Hammel system of using oil as fuel, and was the gift of Mr. Jesse H. Metcalf. With this addition the power-plant is capable of even greater service to the School.

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Providence*

All communications should be addressed to the
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ADMISSIONS.

HOURS OF OPENING.—The galleries are open to the public on every day of the year, with the exception of Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and the Fourth of July. From July 1st to September 15th the hours are from 1 to 5 P. M. on week days and from 2 to 5 P. M. Sundays; from September 15th to July 1st the hours are from 10 A. M. to 5 P. M. week days and

from 2 to 5 P. M. Sundays. The Pendleton Collection is open from 2 to 5 P. M. daily.

Twenty-five cents admission to the museum is charged on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and the museum is free on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Free transferable tickets admitting four persons on pay-days are sent to all members of the corporation. Art students and artists, on application to the authorities, may obtain free tickets of admission for any pay-day. Teachers with pupils of both public and private schools will be admitted without payment upon application.

PHOTOGRAPHS ON SALE.

Photographic copies of many of the objects belonging to the museum, including photographs of the Pendleton Collection of furniture, are on sale at the entrance to the museum.

PUBLICATIONS.

Four quarterly bulletins are issued and are sent free of charge to the members, and, on written request, to alumni of the institution.

The year-book of the school containing detailed information regarding its many activities, and presenting conditions of admission and a list of the courses given in its several departments, will be forwarded free of charge to prospective students and others who are interested in the institution and its work.

COPYING.

Permission to copy or photograph in the galleries of the museum may be obtained in the office. Such permits will not be issued for Sundays or legal holidays.

LIBRARY.

The Library contains 2,994 volumes, 15,683 mounted photographs and reproductions, 1,731 lantern slides, and about 2,945 postcards. During the months of June, July and August the library is closed.